

By Tina Kitt
The Wauneta Breeze

Pet owners are being warned to make sure their pets' rabies vaccinations are up to date after a skunk in rural Chase County tested positive for rabies.

The test was submitted to the Kansas State University College of Medicine for testing by Southwestern Veterinary Services in Wauneta, with a positive test for rabies reported on May 11.

Rabies is a viral neuroinvasive disease that causes inflammation of the brain and is transmitted through saliva, usually passed by a bite. Without treatment, it is fatal to both animals and humans.

This is the first confirmed case of rabies in Chase County in the past seven years, according to DHHS and KSUCVM records.

The last confirmed case was in June 2002, when a hoary bat tested positive, after a sample was submitted for testing by an Imperial veterinarian.

This marks the first time Wauneta veterinarian Steve Pollmann has had a positive rabies test processed through his clinic. Generally, most of the state's rabies cases are seen on the eastern and central areas of the state, notes Pollmann.

This year several rabies tests have been submitted to K-State from Pollmann's clinic, but only that one skunk has tested positive so far.

In a typical year, the clinic submits one or two samples for testing.

The skunk that tested positive at the Wauneta clinic was killed and brought in for testing after it attacked a rural family's dogs. Earlier this spring, a skunk in Hayes County tested positive for rabies, with a dog there also possibly exposed. In March, a cat in Frontier County bit a person and subsequently tested positive for rabies.

With domestic animals often coming into contact with wild animals in rural areas it is important that they be immunized against rabies, stress officials.

According to Pollmann, pets can be immunized after they are four months old. They will need a follow-up immunization the next year, then every third year after that.

In Nebraska, rabies vaccinations must be administered by a veterinarian, but for a reasonable price, a pet can be protected and its owners provided with some peace of mind.

An office call examination and vaccination will likely cost less than \$50, noted Pollmann.

In April, officials in Lincoln County warned residents there to be on the lookout for oddly behaving skunks after a second one tested positive for rabies within a week. Officials say the skunk was found walking during the day and foaming at the mouth.

According to information provided online by the American Veterinary Medical Association, it's important not to shoot an animal in the head when euthanizing it as it will make the brain tissue unsuitable for testing.

So far there have been 32 confirmed instances of rabies in Nebraska, compared with 43 in all of 2008, 31 in 2007 and 35 in 2005. Of this year's 32 reported cases to date, 20 have involved skunks. According to DHHS records dating back to 1973, 1981 was the year the state saw its most cases of rabies at 198.

Helping to control rabies

According to the AVMA there are steps that can be taken to help control the presence of rabies:

- Have your veterinarian vaccinate your dogs, cats, ferrets, and select horses and livestock.

Your veterinarian will advise you on the recommended or required frequency of vaccination.

- Reduce the possibility of exposure to rabies by not letting your pets roam free. Keep cats and ferrets indoors, and supervise dogs when they are outside. Spaying or neutering your pet may decrease roaming tendencies.

- Don't leave exposed garbage or pet food outside, as it may attract wild or stray animals.

- Wild animals should never be kept as pets. Not only may this be illegal, but wild animals pose a potential rabies threat to caretakers and to others. Observe all wild animals from a distance. A rabid wild animal may appear tame but don't go near it. Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals—even if they appear friendly.